

MERCHANDIZING ANALYSIS

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The 6 block commercial spine bounded by Calhoun Street to the north and McMillan Street to the south defines the primary essence of the Clifton Heights business district. The existing pattern of uses features approximately a two block area of community type services occurring at the western end, fast food retail and parking lots in the middle, and adaptive re-use of public spaces, such as churches along the eastern end.

The retail that exists in the District is of low to medium quality -- a significant amount is service related, such as copy shops, laundromats, hair salons, etc. The present quality and lack of retail mass does not induce new businesses or customers to enter the District. This image of poor quality is further enhanced by a lack of clear organization and distribution of retail within the District. The two streets that define the central business core currently counteract their potential contribution to the area: Calhoun and McMillan are heavily traveled commercial routes without sufficient retail density or mix. In addition, the low quality retail shops attached to the front of residential units along McMillan creates a second tier retail street.



Quality neighborhood retail frontage along McMillan Street



Illustration of fast food in-line establishment

Calhoun Street

The lack of retail mass and mix prevents any significant incentive for people to visit the area. Visually, an important factor that affects this retail corridor is the enormous amount of blank voids along both sides of the street. The street edge consist mainly of parking areas, under-utilized open spaces, vacant buildings, and poor quality storefronts.

The one-way traffic system inhibits people to slow down and encourage them to shop. The fast food establishments reinforces this effect via their drive-thrus. In addition, the street environment detracts from the retail frontage and discourages pedestrian movement.

Recommendations:

- Define the street edge with retail along the entire length of Calhoun, from Clifton Avenue to Vine Street;
- Develop planning guidelines that recommend setback from the curb at ground level;
- Replace the fastfood/surface parking lots with infill buildings, min. 3 story to 6 stories high;
- Promote higher and more exciting storefronts that will entice customers;
- Encourage any fast food establishments to become in-line restaurants;
- Identify large enough parcels (25,000 - 100,000 sf) that will encourage regional stores to come into the area;
- Develop an overall retail merchandise strategy for the entire District that will offer a mix of local and regional retail with a variety of other uses, such as entertainment, hotel and cinema;
- Design secondary through block connections that will encourage pedestrian traffic, and visual connection to the University;
- Identify retail uses that can be located on grade with housing above;
- Develop signage/awning guidelines for storefronts;
- Encourage outdoor cafes, public seating areas, vendor programs to create activity along the street;
- Refurbish architecturally significant buildings to accommodate retail usage and provide character for the District;
- Develop parking solutions.



Example of poor store frontage along McMillan Street

McMillan Street

McMillan Street does not exhibit a sense of place with a scattering of uses and quality of buildings stretching along the 6 block length. Although it consist of good quality brick structures and neighborhood retail stores at its western end, the remaining portion disintegrates into low quality small shops attached to single family residences and voids similar to Calhoun.

The street is predominately residential, hard edged, and lacking sufficient retail mass to support new commercial development. The quality of residential ranges from nicely refurbished rowhouses to dilapidated single family residences.

Recommendations:

- Maintain the existing building stock and neighborhood retail use along the 3 block stretch at the western end of McMillan;
- Develop guidelines that would integrate ground level retail units within the existing single family residences in more architecturally sympathetic manner;
- Recreate the street landscape into a softer, pedestrian oriented environment;
- Create open space and visual corridors that will connect to Calhoun Street retail;
- Promote higher density residential development and retail uses that cater to the local community such as food markets, hardware stores, home stores, etc;
- Identify the street edge with special signage, canopies, furniture, and lighting that defines the street as special and more residential oriented.